

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT NOTICE**  
**for the**  
**HORSETHIEF HAZARD FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT**  
**Bureau of Land Management**  
**Billings Field Office**  
**January 2003**

**DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Billings Field Office and the Eastern Montana Fire Zone propose to carry out a hazard fuels reduction project on BLM-administered public lands in the Horsethief area west of Roundup, Montana. The area is located in the wildland-urban interface where a fire start would present a risk to life and property. Between 50 and 100 homes and other structures are located on private lands in the Horsethief area.

The purpose of the project is to reduce fuels in overstocked stands of ponderosa pine, a fuel which is very receptive to ignition. This project would involve several phases and combinations of treatments. Initial treatment would consist of the thinning of small diameter trees and burning and/or chipping the slash. Future treatments may involve the use of broadcast burning. It is estimated that the initial treatment would be completed in one to two years, with follow-up treatments in five years. In order to maintain the conditions created by the treatments, the area would need to be retreated in 10-20 years.

**RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS AND DOCUMENTS**

The Billings Resource Management Plan (RMP, 1984) provides management direction for resources within the Billings Field Office area. This project is in compliance with the RMP and the National Fire Plan as well as current directives regarding forest health and natural fuels management.

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT COMPLIANCE**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Council on Environmental Quality regulations on implementing NEPA, a Billings Field Office/Eastern Montana Fire Zone interdisciplinary team is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) that will describe and evaluate the probable impacts of the proposed action and alternatives. The purpose of an EA is to provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact. The EA also provides the public and decision-makers with sufficient information to understand the environmental consequences of the proposal and to identify and develop appropriate mitigation measures to minimize environmental impacts.

One element of the NEPA process is public involvement. Public comments are sought early in the process to:

- Identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in the EA;
- Identify environmental issues and concerns related to the proposed project; and
- Determine the depth of analysis for issues addressed in the EA.

This notice has been prepared to enable government agencies, the general public, and other interested parties to participate in and contribute to the analysis process. Public input is important in establishing the scope of analysis for any NEPA document, and the BLM encourages public participation.

### **IDENTIFIED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The following issues and concerns have been identified by the interdisciplinary team to-date. It is not meant to be an all-inclusive list, but rather a starting point for public input and a means of identifying the resource disciplines needed to conduct the analysis.

- Potential impacts from forest management activities.
- Potential impacts from prescribed fire activities.
- Potential impacts from wildland fire.
- Potential for spread of noxious weeds following the vegetative treatments.
- Potential impacts to cultural and historic values within the analysis area.
- Post-treatment grazing management.
- Potential impacts to wildlife habitat.
- Potential impact to rare or sensitive plants and/or increase in non-native plant species.
- Visual resource management.
- Potential impacts on recreation use.
- Safety.

### **TIMING NEEDS OR REQUIREMENTS**

Public input is important in establishing the level and scope of the analysis. The public is encouraged to participate throughout the environmental analysis process to help in identifying the level of analysis needed, alternatives to the proposed action, other issues or concerns that should be analyzed, mitigation opportunities, and any other comments or ideas to help ensure the completeness of the analysis process.

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*Horsethief Hazard Fuels Reduction Project Public Involvement Notice*

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Your comments are due by February 28, 2003. Please submit your comments to:

Bureau of Land Management  
Billings Field Office  
5001 Southgate Drive  
Billings, MT 59101

Email: MT\_Billings\_FO@blm.gov

Please note that comments, including names, email addresses, and street addresses of the respondents, will be available for public review and disclosure at the above address during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name, email address, or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this plainly at the beginning of your comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Numerous individuals and organizations including federal agencies, state agencies, county governments, municipalities, media, public land users, industry representatives, individuals, tribes, grazing permittees, rights-of-way holders, landowners, fire agencies, and various organizations are being sent this notice.

A public meeting to explain the project and to obtain public input will be held February 12, 2003, in the Multipurpose Room of Central School, 600 2<sup>nd</sup> Street West, Roundup, Montana, at 7 p.m.